

**SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
VIDEO NEWS RELEASE
12-11-03**

**Water from Lake Toho drawdown to be captured and
stored in unusual places**

Anchor: For the past three years, state fish and wildlife officials have been trying to conduct a drawdown of water levels in central Florida's Lake Tohopekaliga to allow for desperately needed restoration efforts. This year's rescheduled drawdown was also in jeopardy due to the past 12 months of heavy rains and high water levels in all water bodies throughout the South Florida Water Management District. Concerns were raised that additional water flowing south from Lake Toho into Lake Okeechobee would cause further impact to Lake O and the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries, which serve as release outlets for excess water from Lake Okeechobee.

:00 V.O. In an unprecedented move, the South Florida Water Management District today began transferring water from Lake Okeechobee and other areas north of the lake onto agricultural and Seminole Tribe lands that would normally be dry this time of year. Storage of large amounts of water on these private properties will alleviate the need to send additional water from Lake Toho into Lake Okeechobee and ultimately harmful freshwater releases to the estuaries. Members of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board came up with the idea of finding alternate storage sites and were greeted with offers of help from agricultural and Seminole Tribe leaders.

:29 SOT: Chip Merriam
Deputy Executive Director
Water Resources
South Florida Water Management District

:58 V.O. While this cooperative, short-term fix allows water managers to proceed with the Lake Toho drawdown, the long-term fix is on implementing more permanent solutions to regional water storage problems. The Water Management District is actively working with the Corps of Engineers to begin the process of modifying the current operating schedule for Lake Okeechobee. In addition, the agency is expediting the construction of three large reservoirs.

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